

IDOC's one-stop reentry center aims to ease transition from prison to society

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EmilyLowelPT

December 5, 2018



BOISE — To Idaho Department of Correction Reentry Program Manager, a newly released prisoner transitioning back into society must have three aspects met in order to be successful: social support, a safe place to live and meaningful employment.

IDOC's new One-Stop Reentry Center for newly released offenders can potentially help with all of that, said Tim Leigh, the reentry manager.

Wednesday marked the grand opening of the center Leigh had only dreamed of 10 years ago while working with the Department of Labor. Leigh joined the Department of Correction in May.

"A lot of folks (offenders) come out and they don't have anything, they're really scared and they want to succeed, but sometimes they don't know where to go to get what they need to be successful," Leigh said.

A three-year, \$1.5 million grant allows the 4th Judicial District six reentry specialists who work mostly with high- or medium-risk and sex offenders to transition successfully back into society. The specialists begin working with people 60 days prior to their release from prison and 60 days after their release to make sure they're getting the supportive services they need to be successful.

Leigh wanted to utilize the building the specialists were in and invite community partners into the space so that those released from prison and in need of help can have one place to get help, for employment opportunities, safe housing and mental or medical care.

The center, in Suite 150 at 8620 Emerald St., is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday.

Opening the center has been a passion for Leigh, who said he's heard many offenders who exit prison had a negative experience because they didn't know what resources were out there.

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"I want to bring it (resources) to them, so they can come back to society and have a little bit of an easier time," Leigh said. "And for people who want to help, they can come and offer that service a lot easier."

Yes!

Sixteen organizations in the community have already agreed to offer help, including groups like Treasure Valley Treatment and Counseling, TRIO, PATH, Recovery 4 Life and Centro de Comunidad Y Justicia.

IDOC director Josh Tewalt thinks the integration of reentry specialists and the concept of a one-stop center focuses on long-term public safety.

"That's public safety," he said. "It's not just holding somebody accountable for their behavior but providing them the opportunity to change that behavior going forward."

Success of the center will be measured by looking at reduction and recidivism rates and employment of offenders. The hope is that when the grant is complete, IDOC will take the data before the Legislature and show the benefit to offenders and society.

If it proves successful, Leigh would like to see reentry specialists and one-stop centers in each of the judicial districts.

"When they (offenders) get frustrated and they struggle, it's easier for them to turn back to what they knew before, so just making it easier by providing that path and resources to people that really do want to turn it around," Tewalt said, "that benefits all of us."